

Work and Wages Among Hindus---Millions Labor for 10c. a Day---How the Peasants Live---Money Sharks and Their Charges

BY FRANK G. CARPENTER.

Allahabad, 1910.

The unrest of India is largely a matter of wages. Suppose you had to work for 1 cent or 2 cents an hour? Suppose you could have only one square meal every day, and at night after night your family should go to bed hungry? These are the conditions of millions of Hindus. Suppose they existed at home? Would we not have an unrest with a vengeance? I refer the question to brother Gompers for answer.

Low Wages in India.

I have before me a list of the wages the natives are paid. I take them from the statistical abstract sent by the viceroy to the British houses of parliament, and therefore reliable. At Calcutta carpenters, blacksmiths and masons are now receiving less than \$6 a month; and that would be a high average for mechanics throughout Hindustan. In the Province of Oude they are paid less than \$3, and at Agra only \$1 more.

At Patna able-bodied farm hands receive less than \$2 per month. For this they work twelve hours a day and in some cases have to take grain for their wages. The average income for all Hindustan is only about 4 cents a day. Not long ago there was a famine in southern India, during which the government relieved the people by giving them labor on public improvements. It paid 4 cents to the diggers and 3 cents to the women who carried the earth from one place to another in baskets. They worked from daylight till dark. The children were paid 2 cents a day. They were used to break up the clods and smooth over the ground.

The rich and poor at Calcutta.

The truth is the Indian empire is largely an empire of paupers, and that of paupers surrounded by plenty. Tantalus-like, they are up to the neck in the waters of poverty, with rich fruits of all kinds hanging over their heads. When they grasp for the fruits they vanish, and they strive and strive and strive in vain. I was struck by this at Calcutta. That capital is known as the City of Palaces, but it is also a city of hovels. It has its thousands of splendid carriages and automobiles, with coaches and chauffeurs in the most gorgeous liveries. It has rich Englishmen and native rajahs and nabobs who are loaded with jewels; but with them is want so keen that it cuts to the heart. There are thousands upon the street who go almost naked. The dress of the common people is such that the legs of the women are often bare to the knees and of the men to the thighs. The bones are clad only in sinews and skin. There is not enough meat on the legs to tempt a hungry dog. They eat straight as a pipe stem, the swelling of the calves being absent. The arms show nothing but bones. The poor Bengali corresponds to Kipling's description of the woman who was a "rag, a bone and a hank of hair," gave that there is no more and then a stringy muscle thrown in.

These people work almost naked, and their whole forms may be seen. I have spent some time watching them bathing in the Ganges. The water glues the clothes to the skin, and you see thousands of skeletons bathing and praying.

And then the homes of the people! Outside the mansions of the rich, which face the Maidan and the fine buildings of the government, and the palaces of a few rajahs, the native compounds of Calcutta are largely composed of homes no bigger than hockney cases. The stores are mere holes



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Government Clerks Are Poorly Paid.

In the walls. Whole families live in one room, and even out in the country the houses are so small that the beds are set outside in the daytime.

The Farmers.

I have traveled extensively among the farmers of many countries, but I know of no place where they work so hard for so little. This is an agricultural nation. Two-thirds of the people rely upon farming as their principal business, and this means about 200,000,000. There are more than 100,000,000 here who work in the soil, and there are 90,000,000 men, women and children who actually farm. If every man, woman and child in the United States should go out in the fields every day to dig up the land or harvest the crops, you would have the farming situation in India. In addition, there are some millions engaged in stock raising and 2,000,000 or 3,000,000 who take care of domestic animals of various kinds.

The wages of these farmers are low and the American conception. The employees are often paid in kind, getting, in some cases, their food and a small percentage of the crop. Where money is paid, the wages do not average \$2.25 per month, and nowhere, except in Assam, do they rise to \$3. In the valley of the Ganges, where the soil is as fat as that of the Nile, the average wage is \$1.50 monthly, and in the province of Oude it is \$1.25. In addition to this, some of the laborers are head servants, who get only their living, and a cent now and then for a feast.

The farmers who have their own lands are mortgaged up to their eyes, and the money lenders and the tax collector give them no peace. The government levies taxes on the land, and the agitators claim they are exorbitantly high in comparison, and a current book on India states that one-eighth of the entire farming population of Madras has been sold out of their land in the last decade, but their furniture and personal belongings have been taken for taxes. On the other hand, it is claimed that the taxation to-day is less than it has ever been, and that it is lighter per acre than the taxes of any other country of the world. We pay thirteen times as much taxes per head as the Hindus. The Russians pay eight times as much and the English twenty times as much.

Indeed, we shall have to look outside the government for the causes of India's poverty. We can find one in the nature of the people, which leads them to borrow whenever they can, and in the money sharks, who lend at exorbitant rates upon their crops and lands. In many cases the interest is taken in kind, the shark having his agents on the ground and grabbing a share of the grain as it comes from the threshing. The usual rate of interest is 24 per cent, but many and many foreigners are paying 3 per cent a month and upward. In the interior of India the banks charge as much as 10 per cent, per annum, although the government itself has recently been lending money at 5 per cent, something like \$10,000,000 at 5 or 6 per cent.

There is no country where banking is so much of a business. There are castes here who thoroughly understand the breeding value of interest, and there are also in large numbers 10,000 bankers and money lenders, of whom more than 60,000 are women. Much money is loaned upon real estate mortgages, and from this the bankers are getting hold of the land. In some provinces as much as 65 per cent of the country belongs to them, and in others 40 and 50 per cent.

Live in Mud Huts.

The average home of the Hindu peasant is not as good as the average American stable. It is often a mud hut from ten to fifteen feet square, without doors or windows. The floor is plastered with cow dung, and the furniture is a rope bed and a few pots and pans. The house is usually thatched with straw, and its interior is as dark as a barn. It seldom has more than one room, and in this the whole family accommodates itself as it can. The stove is a fireplace made of three or four bricks set on end, and the cooking is done in pots and pans. There are no chimneys, and the smoke finds its way out of the door and from under the eaves.

The most of the farmers live in villages of such huts. In riding across India you see these everywhere dotting the landscape. There are no big schools, houses or churches, no street lamps, no gutters and no sidewalks. There is an absence of painting and whitewash, the only outside decoration being lumps of brown cow dung of the size and shape of a fat buckwheat cake. These are the fuel of the people, plastered upon the walls of the hut to dry. This stuff is picked up by the women and girls, who follow the cattle. They carry the droppings to their houses and mix them with dirt, patting them into shape with their bare hands. Such fuel is used all over India, and the women invariably collect it.

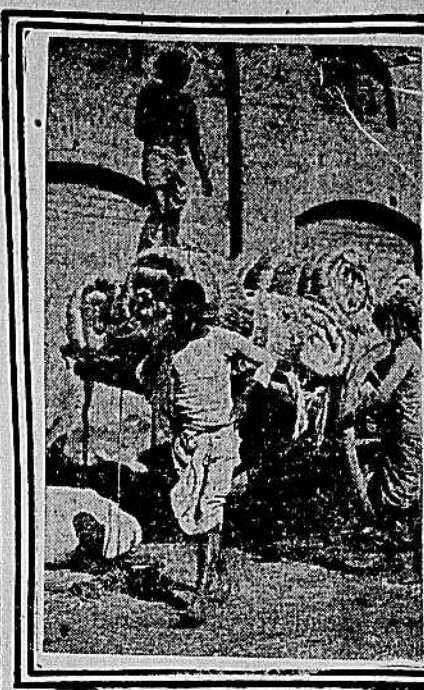
A Starvation Diet.

The Hindu peasants have made feeding a science. They know just how much will suffice to keep them alive, and they eat little more. They save everything and cook just enough. Their diet is chiefly beans, millet and coarse grains, with chili peppers and other condiments. They seldom have meat, and the castes of many of them are such that they would die rather than eat beef or pork. They consider the cow holy, and would as soon think of chewing their grandpapa's as a tenderloin steak. They use a rancid melted butter called ghee.

The Indian farmer rises at daybreak and takes with him a snack of cold food to the field. At noon his wife brings him a hot dinner. He eats first and she takes what is left. At home



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"This Man Gets 1 Cent an Hour."



Hindoo Farm Hands. They Get \$1.50 Per Month, or 3 Cents Per Day.

the people eat off the floor. If they have no reserve force, and when their food is cut down they drop off like sheep. In some parts of India the population is so dense that it does not increase from year to year, the natural growth, which goes on over the rest of the world, being absent.

A striking evidence of the poverty of India is the absolute lack of comforts which is everywhere seen. The peasants live more like animals than men. They will sleep anywhere. I see them lying on the floors of the railway stations with nothing but a thin piece of cotton between their bodies and the stones. In the towns there are public lodging places, where the accommodations cost from 1 to 3 cents a night. The ordinary farmer saves his cent, and camps outside. The most common bed is a rude framework of wood, over which a netting of ropes of the size of a clothes line is stretched. This is the bed of the more favored members of the family. They lie upon the bed spoon fashion; for if they should stretch out their legs their feet would hang over. Sometimes the children, and always the widows sleep on the floor.

Conditions Improving.

Notwithstanding all this, one of the cabinet ministers of the viceroy tells me that the farmers are much better off now than they were in the past.

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IN TOUCH WITH FRIENDS and RELATIVES

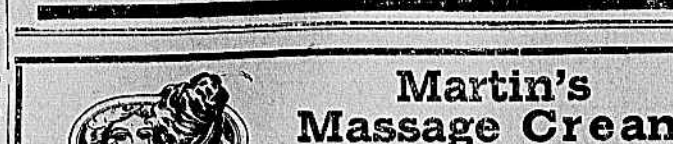


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45c China and Japanese Matting Remnants, from 10 to 25 yards, reduced to 10c yard.

45c China and Japanese Matting Remnants, from 10 to 30-yard lengths, reduced to 15c yard.

Hammocks, close canvas weave—\$4.50 ones reduced to \$2.50 each. All \$3.50 ones reduced to \$2.00 each.

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however, hundreds of mills and factories have sprung into being, and these are equipped with modern machinery. The natives can handle machinery quite as well as we can, and many of these formerly in the textile trade are now working in the cotton mills, and other such institutions. These people are paid what are high wages for this part of the world. In Bombay the cotton mill man gets 20 cents a day, and the women 14 cents. The room will be small, and its only air and light must come through the door. In some other localities the dwellings are better, but as a rule they are about as poor as can be. (Copyright, 1910, by Frank G. Carpenter.)

These factory hands usually live near the mills in mud huts or in buildings made for the purpose. At some of the Bombay factories their dwellings are over shops. A single family will usually have but one room, for which it may pay 25 cents a week. The room will be small, and its only air and light must come through the door. In some other localities the dwellings are better, but as a rule they are about as poor as can be. (Copyright, 1910, by Frank G. Carpenter.)

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